

Ambivalence of Identity: Stories of the Japanese War Brides in New Zealand

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Abstract: *This article explores the construction of identity by the Japanese war brides (sensō hanayome 戦争花嫁) in postwar New Zealand. War brides came to New Zealand in the 1950s in search of a new life with their New Zealand partners. However, Japanese atrocities towards New Zealand prisoners of war were not forgotten there, nor were Japanese actions in Pearl Harbor and in the Pacific. In addition to being reminders of Japan as the enemy, the war brides were non-white in a country that unofficially followed a “white” immigration policy. These initial difficulties did not affect the war brides’ determination to make New Zealand their new home. Through the stories of the war brides and their family members, this article contributes to understanding nascent, informal transnational relations between Japan and New Zealand as they emerged into the early postwar era. It also tells the story of how the transmission of memory of Japan and the Asia-Pacific War has passed from the brides to the “post-memory” generation of their children.*

Keywords: Japanese war brides, “good wife and wise mother,” Asia-Pacific War, New Zealand, cultural identity

Introduction

The commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War in 2020 was overshadowed by the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. National lockdowns that followed brought migration to a halt. Exactly the opposite took place nearly eighty years ago, with the end of the war, and an unprecedented movement of people around the world, and particularly the migration of women (Tamura 2001). Among this massive relocation of people, there was a distinctive group of “war brides,” foreign-born women who married military personnel stationed in their country at the time of the war or during the postwar occupation, then traveled home with them. War brides included a diverse group of women from war-torn Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, including Japan.¹ From 1947 to 1957, some 50,000 Japanese women migrated to the U.S., 650 to Australia, and a small group of about 50 to New Zealand (Shiozaki 2010).² Their experiences in the U.S. and Australia are well documented, due to their higher numbers and the longer historical connections between Japan and these countries. However, the study of Japanese war brides in New Zealand has been mostly neglected. This article will start by discussing the role of cultural memory in constructing a new narrative that assists with the understanding of certain nuances about postwar New Zealand and Japan. This will follow with a brief literature review of Japanese war brides in the New Zealand context. The analysis of oral history (voices) of the Japanese war brides, their husbands, and their children, makes up the core of the article. In the

conclusion, we explore the war brides' legacy and reflect on the transmission of memory of the Asia-Pacific War from the war brides as immediate survivors of the adversities in postwar Japan and New Zealand to the "post-memory" generation of the war brides' children.

Cultural Memory: Creation of a New Narrative

The construction of "cultural memory" always plays an important role in defining collective identity for any new generation. The stories of Japanese war brides have the potential, not only to add new elements to constructing new narratives about postwar New Zealand, but also add new nuances to the three main categories of trauma narratives that developed in postwar Japan, as examined by Akiko Hashimoto (2015). The construction of the first narrative, the war dead as national heroes, Hashimoto suggests, was "intended to cultivate pride in national belonging" (ibid. 7) after the humiliation of defeat in war. The second narrative refers to the victims of the war in the domestic sphere, primarily Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and of multiple US air raids on many other Japanese cities. Similar to the first narrative, this includes only Japanese victims. Japan as aggressor makes up the third type of narrative. Hashimoto argues that this is the most difficult and complicated narrative and usually appears in media, academic publications, intellectual discussions, and in some veterans' memoirs and oral histories (ibid. 8).

In this article, we argue that the memories held and passed on by Japanese war brides do not belong to any of these categories but add new layers to constructing cultural memory of the postwar in Japan and New Zealand. Initially, war brides could be identified as victims of the war and could thus fit into Hashimoto's second category. Nearly all of the war brides who came to New Zealand were from Kure City, a

port town located 25 kilometers south of Hiroshima City in Hiroshima Prefecture. Kure was also the place where the majority of New Zealanders were stationed during their two military missions in Japan.



Figure 1: The Chūgoku region. Map by the Japan Ryokan and Hotel Association, 2014. Reproduced with permission.

In the late nineteenth century, Kure grew into one of the most important naval bases in Japan. The city developed munitions and shipbuilding industries including the naval training facilities in Etajima, about a 20-minute boat ride from Kure. As a result, it became one of the most bombed places from early 1945. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima City on 6 August 1945 did not affect Kure directly. However, the city was inundated with an exodus of wounded people from Hiroshima who required urgent medical help.

After the Asia-Pacific War, New Zealand dispatched two missions to Japan. The first, known as "The J-Force," comprised 12,000 servicemen and women. (Brocklebank 1997; Daniels 2013; Parr 2012). The mission was part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) between 1946 and 1948. BCOF included military personnel from the U.K.,

Australia, India, and New Zealand. The main purpose of this mission was the demilitarization and democratization of Japan. The second mission began during the Korean War (1950–1953) and lasted until 1956. This included 6,000 New Zealanders who were dispatched to Korea as “The K Force,” a part of the British Commonwealth Forces Korea (BCFK) under the U.N. Command (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2014). K Force soldiers went to Japan either for rest and recreation or were assigned to duty service at the base in Japan, with the headquarters in Kure. Both missions provided the opportunity for New Zealand men to meet with Japanese women. In spite of the anti-fraternization policy promoted by BCOF and the negative attitudes in Japan towards women dating “enemy” soldiers, romances started to develop.

The data collected for this research are based on oral history methodology. We consider memory as “an active process of creation of meanings” (Portelli 2006, 37–38). Alistair Thomson suggested that “the subjectivity of memory provided clues not only about the meanings of historical experience, but also about the relationships between past and present, between memory and personal identity, and between individual and collective memory” (2011, 80). In this project, we aim to understand how people make sense of their past, how they connect their personal experiences with the social and historical contexts, and how they manage to interpret their own lives and the world around them.

Nine war brides, two husbands and eight children told their stories through in-depth interviews that were followed by a focus group meeting. The interview questions followed the life trajectory of the war brides, starting with the questions about meeting their future husbands in Japan, reasons for leaving Japan, their adjustment to life in New Zealand and, finally, their connections with Japan in the course of their lives. The conversations

continued beyond the formal interviews, which provided additional data for this research. Further contacts with the war brides in Australia and the U.S. added to our understanding of the topic. (Figure 2)

Code	Name	Category	Code	Name	Category
WB01	Mariko*	War bride □	WBS04	Kazue*	War bride (deceased) □
WB02	Chieko*	War bride □	H02	Thomas*	Kazue's husband
WBS01	Setsuko	War bride (deceased) □	WBS05	Taeko	War bride □
CD03	Deb	Setsuko's daughter	CD05	Sonia	Taeko's daughter
CS02	Leo	Setsuko's son	WBS06	Tamiko	War bride (deceased) □
CD04	Jo	Setsuko's daughter	CS03	Denis	Tamiko's son
WBS02	Sachiko	War bride (deceased) □	WBS07	Haruko*	War bride □
CS01	Michael	Sachiko's son	WBS08	Sumiko*	War bride □
WBS03	Michiko	War bride (deceased) □	WBS09	Teruko*	War bride □
H01	Bob	Michiko's husband	WBS10	Toshie	War bride □
CD01	Michele	Michiko's daughter			
CD02	Sandra	Michiko's daughter			

Figure 2: Names and Codes of Interview Participants

WB: War bride, H: Husband.
CD: Child -daughter, CS:
Child-son

WBS: War brides' stories
obtained from families

* Pseudonyms

□ Stories collected (from war
brides, husbands and
children)

□ Stories collected from
secondary sources

Changing Profiles of the War Brides

Research on Japanese war brides in the U.S. and Australia often pointed out that most of the war brides lacked good English language skills, which limited their ability to participate in the community or to have access to work (Glenn 1986; Hayashi 2005; Tamura 2001; 2002). Hence, without economic independence or external connections, many of these war brides were obliged to become stay-at-home mothers or to take up menial jobs, which did not require much English (Glenn 1986; Tamura 2001). At the same time, in the hope of easing racial tensions in the U.S. (Ishikawa 2008; Storrs 2000; Tsuchiya 2011a), the women who went to the U.S. were portrayed as ideal American housewives (Hayashi 2005; Hayashi; Tamura and Takatsu 2002; Simpson 1998) or “model Japanese-Americans” (Simpson 1998). Adding to this, these women were also promoted as model immigrants (Ishikawa 2008; Storrs 2000; Tsuchiya 2011a) or model citizens (Hamano 2011; Tamura 2009). With these loaded expectations, the Japanese war brides did their best to play the expected roles and to fit into American society through assimilation. Similarly, the Japanese war brides who went to Australia tried to quickly become “model Australian housewives” (Tamura 2009). In fact, the assigned role was not particularly difficult for the Japanese war brides as it resembled the gender role of the “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母) that developed during the Meiji era (186-1912) in Japan. In the U.S., this practice of framing the newcomers as model citizens caused strong resentment from earlier Japanese immigrants, who had spent the war years in internment camps, resulting in the isolation of war brides from the existing Japanese diaspora (Simpson 1998).

The concept of the “good wife, wise mother” was part of the official strategy of the Japanese government to create a particular gender role for women to assist with constructing a new “modern” state (Gordon 2013, 8891; 262-264;

Uno 2005, 493-519). It was a fluid concept, as it was developed over a long period, beginning in the Meiji era and continuing into the Taishō (1912-1926) and Shōwa eras (1926-1989). Thus, it was a cultural and societal value that influenced women’s behavior rather than a declared doctrine. Sharon Nolte and Sally Hastings called it “the guiding aphorism for gendered policy on women,” which survived in Japan until the present (1991, 158). It sealed women’s place in the private sphere — the home — where they took care of the children while supporting their husbands who worked in the public sphere, outside the home. Thus, it essentially removed them from participation in the public sphere. In addition, the role of the “wise mother” was to ensure that the children would receive the best possible education and be socialized as good Japanese citizens prepared to serve the state. Dorinne Kondo (1990) argued that becoming a mother in Japan is linked with internalizing Japan’s unequal gender relations among men and women. This new virtue of the “good wife, wise mother” that accompanied Japanese modernization was influenced by Western perceptions of the role of women in society, which in reality denied women’s agency. This occurred during the Meiji era, when Japan was eagerly learning from the West while holding the perception of the West as “civilized and enlightened,” modern, progressive, and superior. The concept of the “good wife, wise mother” was equally influenced by “Confucian rhetoric on women’s responsibility for the inner domain and male domination” (Nolte and Hastings 1991, 172). This hybrid concept required Japanese women’s sacrifice and submission, and equally self-reliance, industriousness, and resilience, qualities that were in high demand in their new countries of residence. The prescribed gender role of the “good wife, wise mother” limited Japanese women’s options to marry foreigners, as it would distract them from the primary role of women contributing to building a strong nation. This impacted the stigmatization of war brides, which the Japanese media started as

soon as the Allied Occupation forces arrived in Japan in August 1945 and lasted for many years even after the end of the occupation in 1952. Japanese media described Japanese women who mixed with “enemy” soldiers as prostitutes and/or traitors (Dower 1999; Hayashi 2005; Hayashi et al. 2002; Tsuchiya 2011a, 2011b). In the eyes of many Japanese, particularly men, the association of Japanese women with foreign soldiers was a disgrace (Hayashi 2005; Hayashi et al. 2002) and brought deep shame to the women and their families. Consequently, many women who married foreigners were disowned by their families (Tsuchiya 2011a; Yoshimizu 2009). Thus, many women who chose non-Japanese husbands had to leave Japan without any prospect of returning to avoid bringing shame to their families in Japan (Yoshimizu 2009).³ Hence, the expression of “war bride” retained a predominantly pejorative meaning among the Japanese, especially among those who had lived through the Asia-Pacific war.⁴

In the New Zealand context, the war brides equally caused a certain controversy. Gabrielle Fortune, who researched a cohort of war brides predominantly from Canada, Britain, Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, depicted the complexities of identity formation of the war brides and their struggle to negotiate their old identities with new expectations dictated by the novel environment, combined with social isolation and loneliness (2006; 2009). At the same time, New Zealanders had to grapple with how they should categorize war brides from different countries following the social and ethnic hierarchy that preoccupied the public discourse. Women from Europe, for example, were viewed as “flighty, unreliable, hypersexualized” (Fortune 2009, 62) while New Zealanders were in general comforted by the fact that these women could often speak the same language. While the host society was trying to decide if these women arrived on a “bride ship” or a “brothel ship,” gradually the people of the host nation viewed them as “the wives of servicemen and the mothers (and

future mothers) of their children” (ibid. 65); thus, the women were generally able to blend into society.

Perhaps because of the small numbers, in contrast with war brides from Europe and a few other destinations, Japanese war brides were not widely known to the New Zealand public nor given scholarly attention.⁵ Fortune’s research hardly mentions Japanese war brides (2006; 2009). Peter Boston’s interview with a Japanese war bride, Tsuruko Lynch, featured in *Japan and New Zealand 150 Years* (1999), albeit as a one-page summary. Boston describes Tsuruko’s interactions with the neighbors who helped her “to adapt to New Zealand society and focus on being a good wife and mother” (ibid. 148). This clearly indicates that the New Zealand perception of gender roles was not dissimilar to the Japanese concept of “good wife, wise mother.” As this is the only interview available in English, it was quoted by other scholars of the war brides, including Fortune (2009, 75).

Two New Zealand postwar military missions in Japan and Korea attracted the attention of a few New Zealand and British historians such as Trotter (1990), Brocklebank (1997), Parr (2010, 2012), and McGibbon (1999) and Daniels (2013). However, their attention was primarily on the New Zealand military personnel stationed in Japan and Korea and the internal politics behind these two missions, and not the affiliation of some of the men with Japanese women. The absence of academic research and general public awareness about Japanese war brides in New Zealand makes this research particularly relevant and timely, as the remaining women and their husbands are in their twilight years.

Voices of the War Brides and their Family Members

Leaving Japan: Hope for a Better Life

During and immediately after the war, most of the women who later became war brides had to support their families. In many cases, their fathers, brothers or uncles, the main breadwinners, were either killed or incapacitated during the war. Working at the military base or associating with businesses that dealt with soldiers was very attractive for young women as it allowed them to earn more money than working at local operations. This common ground provided New Zealand soldiers and Japanese women with opportunities to meet (Kanazawa 2017).

Talking about life during the war, the war brides and their family members reiterate the total devastation and loss that occurred. Mariko, whose family house was in Kure City, shares her memory after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima:

When we came out of the shelter the following morning, the city was completely flattened. Our house and my father's factory — they were all gone. No house, nothing on one side leaving vacant houses on the other side intact. [After the atomic bomb was dropped] we saw dead bodies being carried from Hiroshima City. Those who died near the sea were bloated, undistinguishable and the stench was so awful. Every day, those bodies were burned, and the smell was simply horrible. (Mariko: WB01)

In the words of Denis, the son of another war bride, Tamiko: "She told us [after an air raid] how power lines were hanging down on the street, and she witnessed one of her friends being electrocuted. She would tell us how hard it was growing up and they never had enough food. Certainly, growing up during the war would be quite tough." (Denis: CS03)

Michiko's husband, Bob, talks about the situation he found his future wife was in: "The life was uncertain. They [Michiko's family] lost their home. Their house was demolished. And she was lucky to be alive, but she was badly wounded by shards of glass in her arms [from the atomic bomb]." (Bob: H01)

Taeko's daughter, Sonia, remembers the story of her mother:

By the time she [Taeko] met my New Zealand father, her own father had been killed. Her father was a navy engineer, and his boat was torpedoed. And after that, the house that they were living [in] burnt down. And so they pretty much had to take whatever they had left and went to stay with her mother's family and went to Takehara and by the time she was 18, she ran away [from home]. (Sonia: CD05)

The war brides had different socioeconomic backgrounds. Some came from the families of farmers and fishermen, others were the daughters of the navy personnel or businessmen, which put them in a more affluent category. However, by the end of the war, they all found themselves in very devastating conditions. Thus, the war brides fit the narrative of victims of the war presented by Hashimoto (2015). At the same time, like many other survivors of tragic events, Japanese war brides were unwilling to talk much about their suffering during or immediately after the war. However, the poor condition they found themselves in was one of the major push factors for the young women wanting to leave their homes. The eldest son of Setsuko, Leo, explains: "She made a conscious choice to leave because of some of the stories of what had happened and the hardships [in Japan]. She basically felt that she wanted to go. It wasn't like she was rejecting [it]. She felt that

there was nothing for her. Because the family weren't keen on her going, that's where she cut the communications." (Leo: CS02)

Leo's younger sister, Jo, added: "She almost felt she was abandoned. Because her father had died, and the war, and the pre-war, and her mother had to leave both her children [who were brought up by two different sets of grandparents]. My Mum had to forge her own way." (Jo: CD04)



Figure 3: Wedding of Sachiko and Britt (Michael's parents) in Hiroshima in 1956 (courtesy of the Jones family).

It was the women's own decision to marry New Zealanders and to leave Japan, which indicates the presence of agency. Michael describes his mother's personality: "She is very stubborn and when she made her mind to do [something], she would do it whether it is the same for a lot of Japanese women that have left Japan to come. They had to have something different about them, because it takes a lot to leave your

own culture to go to a completely alien culture and set up a new life." (Michael: CS01)

An additional factor that encouraged them to leave Japan was the treatment of women at the military bases when they started working there. They could observe female officers of the Occupation Forces and UN Forces, who were treated relatively equally to the men, which was attractive and empowering for them. "Michiko's father was very traditional. He wanted her to conform to what he wanted, and she sought against that ideas. I think, at that stage, she [had] enough of Japan, and the Japanese conservative outlook. Michiko was a bit angry about the conservative aspects of Japanese society." (Bob: H01)



Figure 4: Michiko and Bob Arriving in Auckland, *Auckland Star*, 29 March 1954.

The dissatisfaction with the conservative features of Japanese society that resulted in search for gender equality that was hard to achieve in postwar Japan together with the search for a better life became a strong pull factor for the women to move to New Zealand.

The children of the war brides emphasized that going to New Zealand meant a one-way ticket for their mothers. The war brides knew that going back would bring further shame to their families. In Michael's words: "My mother said when she left Japan, her father said, 'If you are leaving Japan, you cannot come back.' I think she was basically disowned. She couldn't go back, although she wanted to [...] because she had gone against the will of her father, although [her] father died." (Michael: CS01)

War brides' determination was summed up in the words of Michele, daughter of Michiko: "She had such a big ego, she would invent a life that we never knew. It was like she invented her life away from the traditional Japanese daughter to someone who is really out there." (Michele: CD01)

Another potential reason for leaving Japan, according to Sonia, Taeko's daughter, was the future of children from mixed marriages in Japan: "I think that one of the reasons that Mum actually came to New Zealand was because Mum said that Jōji [a son born in Japan] would have such a hard time in Japan being a 'haafu' [half Japanese, half New Zealander]. So that was her big reason for coming here." (Sonia: CD05)

In the Japanese context, where the place of a woman in society was determined by her role as a "wise mother," women wished to protect their children from possible ostracism of being "half-caste" ("haafu") by leaving their homeland. All this made war brides look at New Zealand as a land of hope, rather than as a former enemy.

Arriving in New Zealand: Between Pride and Prejudice

Japanese war brides arrived in the country where the public perceptions of Japan were filled with bitterness and fear. "Jap brutality" and "fiendish cruelty" were common epithets used by New Zealand media as the returning prisoners of war told their stories about life in Japanese captivity (Bennett 2018, 169).⁶

The memories of discrimination outlived some war brides. Leo shared his own memory of the conversation with the women who knew his mother when she first arrived in New Zealand and lived in Masterton, a small rural town on the south of the North Island:

It was quite a number of years after my mother had died, and I was up in the Tihara at a function. There was a woman who came up to me and said, "I just needed to apologize to you for the way your mother was treated." I hadn't known anything about this, other than that she [Leo's mother] said that she never liked living in Masterton. So, I said [to the woman], "What do you mean?" She said "Because of the war, your mother was treated very badly (in Masterton)" (Leo: CS02)

Occasionally, the anti-Japanese sentiments were replaced with racial tensions. In the words of Michele:

She never made us aware of it [racial tensions], because she never wanted to color our thinking. But I can remember [on a cruise ship] an Australian guy said. "I don't want to be at the table with that man and his half-caste children." And my father

was so upset. My mother said, “Who cares? That’s his problem. I am happy.” You know, she didn’t care, she didn’t worry at all. (Michele: CD01)

Clearly, best in Asia. Terrible. But I think there is that.” (Sandra: CD02)

On some occasions, the children were mistaken for Māori. Denis described his school years:

However, Japanese war brides were not free of their own ethnic, racial prejudices they inherited from the colonial ideology of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere that put Japan above every other country and nation in Asia (Lie 2001; Weiner 2004). The following memories of the war brides’ children testify that their mothers felt extremely proud to be Japanese but equally felt hurt to be mistaken for “other” Asian, such as Chinese and Koreans. In Leo’s recollection: “When I went to school, I got bullied for six months. My defense mechanism, initially, was that I told other people I was Chinese, not Japanese. Because, you know ... I thought there was going to be less of a problem. There was still some discrimination against Chinese. But that annoyed my mother.” (Leo: CS02)

Most people always thought that I was a Māori. And they’d be quite surprised when they heard that I am not, because of my accent and the fact that they sort of assume that I have a dark complexion that I must be a Māori. But often I wouldn’t tell them. I just let them believe what they wanted to believe. So, never it was a problem for me. Never an issue for me. My sister is sort of fair and had lighter hair, so I don’t even know if she was ever mistaken for being part Asian or Japanese. My brother probably was very similar to me. As we got older, it’s actually something we have been very proud of. Yeah, it’s quite cool. Certainly, nothing to be ashamed of. (Denis: CS03)

Even knowing that Leo may be less discriminated against if his classmates thought that he was Chinese, Setsuko was not prepared for her son to be perceived as Chinese. Tamiko, Denis’s mother, echoed similar sentiments: “She said, make sure people don’t call you Chinese. Japanese! Japanese! Not Chinese, but Japanese! Yes, she was very, very staunch and very stoical when it came to that. I do remember my mum being very sort of proud of being Japanese and showing almost dislike for Chinese and Koreans.” (Denis: CS03)

War brides’ children’s identity, this demonstrates, was shaped by New Zealand concept of ethnic relations with the strong emphasis on biculturalism that, at least in theory, equates the relations between Māori, indigenous people of New Zealand, and Pākehā (typically New Zealanders of European descent). While the perceptions of their mother were shaped by the Japanese concepts and hierarchies of ethnicity.

Being identified as Korean met similar criticism by war brides. According to Sandra, her mother, Michiko, described one of the women in her circle: “Looking back now, this was a bit naughty of her [my mother] would say, ‘She is not Japanese. She is Korean.’ You know that Japanese arrogance. I remember Mum saying that, so I used to think, the message that I got was that ‘the Japanese were the best in Asia.’

Finally, neither the war brides nor their husbands were prepared to acknowledge the existence of prejudice or discrimination against the women. Acknowledging their hardship and discrimination would contradict the construction of their new identity of being happy and successful, which they worked so hard to construct in New Zealand. They did not talk about it, but their children did.

Adjusting to New Zealand: Ambivalence of Identity

The vision of success for the war brides was often interlinked with gaining economic independence. One of the first skills the women had to master for their independence was learning to drive. Mariko recollects her own experience: “I learnt to drive only after the children started to go to school. I had to take them to various places after school so I thought it was necessary. I never imagined that I would ever drive when I was in Japan.” (Mariko: WB01)

The next step was an attempt to use their skills, which was a part of their education and upbringing in Japan, to get a job outside home. Sonia recalls how her mother adapted to her new life: “She (my mother) had an amazing eye for detail, and she can draft patterns. When she spent time working in the hospital, they would get her to do outfits for people with burns. I think her record was 20 minutes for a blouse because my older sister said, ‘I’ve got nothing to wear!’.” (Sonia: CD05)

Initially, the women demonstrated their skills in handicrafts, including sewing, knitting, and patternmaking. Some of them began to work professionally as seamstresses or dress-makers, which created opportunities for a certain degree of financial independence. Although these jobs were strongly gendered, the fact that the war brides used their skills to create work opportunities for themselves indicates that the women started to adjust to New Zealand society. In addition, the women who went to New Zealand generally had reasonably good English skills which they had acquired at the workplace while in Japan where the use of English was mandatory. This differentiated them from the war brides who went to the U.S. and Australia. As relations between New Zealand and Japan began to improve in the 1960s, the war brides were in demand as

interpreters and translators for new business exchanges, the emerging tourism sector and assisting with hosting cultural events. Their bilingual and bicultural skills proved to be in high demand during the important time of rekindling bilateral relationships between the two countries due to the absence of other Japanese residents in New Zealand or other Kiwis familiar with Japan and the Japanese language. In Chieko’s memory: “When I started to work, there weren’t so many Japanese tourists. Then tourism started to pick up. Many specialized tours from the Japanese Agricultural Cooperatives and business visitors started to come to New Zealand. I worked very hard. Then I started to get requests to work for these specialized inspection tours for racehorses, dairy products, cut flowers and so forth.” (Chieko: WB02)

The Japanese Embassy would invite women to take part in receptions requiring them to wear kimono to create an ambiance. The photo of Setsuko and Sachiko displayed below (Figure 4), captures one of many moments when the women were asked (or ordered) to perform Japanese culture during some formal occasions. This again confirms that the women were reproducing gender roles constructed for them by Japanese society that focuses primarily on the service roles for women. In fact, the ambivalence of their identity was present in how they exercised their Japanese feminine identity in New Zealand. The women understood the intention of the embassy. In Mariko’s words: “In the beginning, they [Consulate General of Japan] often had parties and we were invited. They would instruct us to come in kimono. Such invitations stopped coming around the 1960s when Japanese trading firms started to set up their offices in New Zealand. It was very cunning of them.” (Mariko: WB01)



Figure 5: Promoting Expo with friends, Setsuko, and Sachiko in the 1970s (Courtesy of the Jones family)

Sewing and other handcrafts were probably the least hindering for the women at the beginning when they were still mastering English and had little children. The work not only generated extra income but also assisted them in building confidence in their newly adopted country. Haruko proudly (WBS07) testified that she used to earn more than her husband when she was a part-time interpreter for a fishing company in 1961 (Marychurch 2009). Later, she and other war brides established a company called Northern Steam Shipping Co. that dealt with the Japanese firm. After selling this company, Haruko was involved in building another company called Air Marine Service. Three years later, she was behind establishing yet another new company called Japan Marine Providers, which had offices in Auckland and Wellington. Finally, she was involved with establishing a duty-free shop called Regency Duty Free (ibid.)

Mariko (WB01) used to work for Haruko's company as an interpreter for incoming fishing boats and accompany injured or sick crew members to hospital. Setsuko (WBS01) was one of the founders of the Japan Society in Wellington, and she was involved in introducing Japanese culture to New Zealand.

Setsuko also worked as an interpreter and land operator for fishing and shipping companies. Chieko (WB02) worked as an interpreter and a liaison person specializing in business that would later become the primary trading commodities between Japan and New Zealand, including dairy products, cut flowers and racehorses. Almost as soon as she landed in Hawke's Bay in 1956, Taeko (WBS05) began teaching Japanese and co-founded the Hawkes Bay Japan Society with others who used to be in the J Force or K Force. She was instrumental in bringing in *nashi* pears and other fruits and vegetables to New Zealand when she was associated with the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR). Michiko (WBS03) met her childhood friend from Hiroshima, who was the captain of a fishing boat, during his visit to New Zealand. From then onward, her family would often invite fishing boat crew members to their house to allow them to experience the Kiwi lifestyle. She also assisted grieving Japanese families after an airplane crash over Antarctica in 1979.⁷ These testimonies of professional success suggest that the "good wife, wise mother" ideology served the war brides well, as it helped them to combine their work at home with work outside of the home. The "cult of productivity," an important element of the "good wife, wise mother" concept since the Meiji era, helped them not only to achieve certain financial independence, but equally made them feel good about themselves, and empowered them.

Tamiko (WBS06) was mostly a stay-at-home mother but she with her Japanese friend assisted Japanese tourists who required hospitalization during their trips. She even made a brief television appearance to talk about Japanese traditional culture such as flower arrangement.

Regardless of what the war brides did for work, their feminine identity was always present. This nurturing role of the "mother," a caretaker,

was captured well in Sonia's memory of her mother: "She was basically like another grandma [to the students]. And they would go to her place to eat Japanese food. She drove them around and do [sic] all sorts of things and she kept in touch . . . She was always that touchpoint for whenever anybody needed Japanese food or somebody to talk about Japan." (Sonia: CD05)

Michele provides a very similar recollection of her mother's desire to help other Japanese who started to come to New Zealand in the 1960s:

She was a very generous person with time. There were not a lot of Japanese people where, she [was] in those days, she wanted to reach out to people who were Japanese to help them when the first wave of young Japanese came to New Zealand to make a life of themselves, she was happy to reach out to them and take them into our house and counsel them and talk to them. (Michele: CD01)

Through their work, paid or voluntary, they were on the front line at the early stage of developing new trade and diplomatic relationships between New Zealand and Japan in the 1960s and 1970s.

Raising Children: Contest for Identity Continues

Children's upbringing and children's education became the most complex area for the Japanese war brides in terms of fulfilling their role of "good wife and wise mother," being a "model minority," constructing their own hybrid identity, while trying to do their best for their children. Michael, the son of Sachiko, discussed the life priorities of his mother and other war

brides: "They put all their efforts into children. In hindsight, I am thinking that their children are very important and that was their main focus. They wanted their children to do well. That the only way to get on in a new country was to educate yourself." (Michael: CS01)

Leo had vivid recollections of discussions with his mother when he did not meet her expectations: "She was always wanting us to do well in education. She would reward us if we got first in class and she wanted us to do well. [When I failed crucial papers] she got really upset and she was crying. I never understood why she was upset. She said, 'You have an opportunity here. You are not taking it seriously.' She wanted us to succeed since she was denied [education.]" (Leo: CS02)

Education of their children was the top priority for the war brides for a number of reasons. Most of the women were born in the 1930s, and in the 1940s many of them had to leave school after primary education to help with household chores during the growing militarization of Japan and the subsequent war. Tertiary education was basically closed for women. The high value of education was part of social consciousness in Japan since the Meiji era (Horio 1988; Kolesova 2004; Rohlen and LeTendre 1998). The women often expressed their indignation for not having had the chance to pursue education and wished for their children to fulfil this dream of receiving the best possible education. However, that was more than fulfilling their dream. By providing the best education for their children, they were fulfilling the role of "good wife and wise mother," which was not only a cultural value instilled in them when they were still in Japan but equally the value which was reinforced in their new country. It was their adaptation mechanism and a fundamental part of reconstructing their identity in New Zealand. Finally, it also encapsulated their insecurity and vulnerability as immigrants they were carrying through their lives. In the words of

Chieko (WB02): “I used to beg my children to complete university. I told them, ‘I don’t want others to criticize me [for their lack of education] just because your mother was Japanese’.”⁸

To encourage their children’s academic success, the women were willing to give up speaking Japanese at home, often at the recommendation of children’s school teachers, who were often supported by their husbands. Speaking any language other than English was regarded as inferior in New Zealand during the 1960s and 1970s. Sonia has a brother who was born in Japan, and she remembered a story told by her mother, Taeko: “When my eldest brother arrived in New Zealand, he couldn’t speak any English. And then he went to school, the teacher there said, ‘Oh, he has to learn English. You’ve got to teach him English. Don’t teach him Japanese at home. Got to learn English.’ So, none of us learned Japanese at home.” (Sonia: CD05)

To compensate for their missed opportunities, many of the women began to attend local night schools to improve their English skills and learn other subjects as soon as it became possible. War brides were determined to catch up with their education as they perceived education as another step toward constructing their new identity.

Similar to their work experience discussed earlier, the ambivalence of their identities is present in the relations of the women with their children. Although they gave up the Japanese language, the women were determined to pass on what they called “the beauty of Japan,” in other words idealistic images of their former home, to their children. By conveying their messages, they taught their children to be proud of Japan.

Giving such a high priority to the education of their children, the women again followed the Japanese gender role model of “good wife and wise mother,” which also meant teaching their

children some fundamental Japanese values including a strongly embedded sense of patriotism for their own country of origin. In the words of Leo, who was the older son of Setsuko:

The conversation with me was t always that you were the oldest. You will look after your younger brother. You need to look after [your] sisters. She turned to me as an obligation. She would be protecting her children, based on her values set. The values that she brought with her. Just like Japanese cooking; they were adapted for the local produce but also our tastes. She continued the cooking and she continued the values that she had when she left Japan. Her values were not negotiable. (Leo: CS02)

Leo’s words suggest that his mother retained her Japanese identity. All children had observed their mothers’ commitment to maintaining Japanese cultural values, customs, work ethics, cuisine, and discipline through their daily practices, which the war brides were determined to pass on to their children.

One of the biggest regrets for the war brides, particularly in the first 10 years after arriving in New Zealand, was their inability to visit Japan, and not being able to see their families. Eventually, many were able to make trips back to Japan, around the Tōkyo Olympics (1964) and the World Expo that was held in Ōsaka in 1970. The Japan they had known had changed so much. The idealized image of Japan that many had cherished for years had vanished. Michele’s remembers her mother’s words on her return to New Zealand: “She came back [from her first trip back to Japan] and she said, ‘Oh, it’s good to be home.’ And we were laughing, saying, ‘You are home now. This is your home. What about Japan?’ She said, ‘Oh, it

is too fast. Too fast for me now. It's a different Japan.'" (Michele: CD01)

Such trips to Japan often played a defining role in encouraging war brides' belief that they now belonged to New Zealand. They realized that the country they left behind no longer existed. Their home was in New Zealand. However, the memories of the past were still cherished and passed on to their children in constructing cultural memories of Japan.

Conclusion

Looking back, Mariko saw herself as, "Nothing special, except for the fact that I have lived here long" (Mariko: WB01). War brides' children found it equally hard to explain the contribution of their mothers to New Zealand society. In Denis's words: "Her contribution to New Zealand would be basically living here and having a family and leaving that sort of legacy for my mum and other Japanese ladies [who] have come, yes, definitely sending a good message about New Zealand to Japan (Denis: CS03). In the recollection of another daughter of the war bride: "She pretty much came to New Zealand and hit the ground running, in terms of having to work and then building up a really good group of people around her that were really supportive." (Sonia: CD05).

The war brides' agency can often be seen through their quotidian lives. Settling down, putting down roots, incorporating certain elements of Japanese culture into their new life, bringing up family, supporting the education of their children, telling their children about "the beauty of Japan" and just living.

The stories of the war brides reveal their first-hand experiences in Japan and New Zealand, which have been passed on to their children as living memories. To describe their life experiences, the Japanese term "*tsugiki*" can be useful. In gardening "*tsugiki*" means grafting a

new branch to an old one so allowing the new to grow healthier. Starting their journey to New Zealand as victims of war and prejudice in their own country, facing certain hostility and discrimination in the new country, these women were able to construct new lives and identities combining their Japanese values with the expectations of New Zealand society, which were not dissimilar to their own values, as we have found. Based on the war brides' stories collected, the war brides successfully performed the Japanese gender role of "good wife and wise mother" in a New Zealand context, as it helped them to adapt and adjust to New Zealand life. In this sense, the stories of Japanese war brides in New Zealand are similar to the stories of war brides who settled in the U.S. and Australia. In the end, all these countries wanted from the war brides was to be good wives and mothers and by doing so to become model citizens.

Although the initial pull factor for some war brides was in moving to a society with more equal gender roles, they reproduced the concept of the "good wife wise mother" in their new country in response to the local expectations of them. The ambivalence of their identity was that as they were mastering new skills, including English, learning to drive, getting work outside the home, and even constructing their own networks, at the core of their activities was the nurturing role of the mother, the caretaker. Through gaining some financial independence and developing spiritual independence, they mostly performed activities that had a strong association with feminine responsibilities of caring for and looking after others. The war brides and their family members told the story of mostly self-resilient, industrious women who were able to construct a satisfying life for themselves and their families by integrating certain values of the "good wife, wise mother" with the demands that New Zealand society placed upon them. Returning again to the metaphor of "*tsugiki*," due to the success of their roles as mothers,

their children became newly grafted branches combining their New Zealand identity with great interest and deep respect for Japan. As they grew up in New Zealand, their mothers taught them their values and passed to them their love for Japan, and helping to reinforce their own ties with their maternal country. Throughout their lives, it was apparent that these women maintained an almost indefatigable sense of optimism about their present and their futures. This powerful sense of optimism and a sense of purpose underscored the success of these women in the roles of good wives and wise mothers.

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Notes

¹ The term "war brides" in this study refers to the Japanese women who married foreign servicemen whom they met in Japan, either during the postwar military occupation or subsequent military mission during the Korean War (roughly between 1945 and the late 1950s), and then migrated to New Zealand between 1953 and 1958. This followed the signing of the Treaty of San Francisco in 1952, which officiated the normalization of the relationship between New Zealand and Japan.

² A data search of the New Zealand National archive database, Archway, revealed the existence of 50 potential Japanese female (war bride) immigrants during the period 1953-1958 (Archives New Zealand, n.d.). The same number is mentioned by Ian McGibbon (1999, 133). In the course of the interviews with Japanese war brides and their family members conducted between 2014 - 2016 a similar number was confirmed. (Kanazawa 2017).

³ Liberalization of individual overseas travels in Japan was only made possible in 1964. The war brides who left Japan in the 1950s were permitted to leave under special bilateral visa arrangements. Likewise, for New Zealand men, without the government's authorization, the travel cost they would have to bear at that time would have been prohibitively expensive.

⁴ This sentiment seems to have remained in the minds of war brides as many women were reluctant to be interviewed for this research.

⁵ Fortune provides a number of 4,000 women (and 1,000 children) who arrived in New Zealand mainly from the U.K., Canada including smaller numbers from Italy, Greece, Crete as well as the Middle East, North Africa and Japan. Although these numbers may look small, it is important to remember that the population of New Zealand according to 1951 census was only 1,939,472 (Statistics New Zealand n.d.).

⁶ About 100 mainly airmen and seamen attached to the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force were captured by Japanese troops. 26 soldiers (mostly coastwatchers) became prisoners of war in the Pacific theatre, only seven of these men survived Japanese camps (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, n.d.).

⁷ A commercial flight operated by Air New Zealand have crashed in 1979 at the low slopes of Mt Erebus in Antarctica. It is known as Erebus disaster and is recognized as the worst airplane crash in New Zealand history. Among 237 passengers and 20 crewmembers killed in the crash, there were 24 Japanese tourists. In the following months after the crash, the bodies

of the crash victims were delivered for post-mortem examination to New Zealand. War brides tried to provide comfort and support to the family members who arrived in New Zealand from Japan to collect the bodies. For further details: [Erebus Disaster](#) (Ministry of Culture and Heritage n.d.).

⁸ The Japanese war brides were not alone in their desire for their children to succeed in education. Research worldwide indicates that many immigrant parents believe academic success is the best way for their children to succeed, compared to native-born parents of that country (Areepattamannil and Lee, 2014).